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Comparative analysis of juvenile delinquency and non delinquency

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Abstract

Adolescence is the most complex stage of development of the youngster on his way to adulthood. This period seems to raise the greatest difficulties in the educational process because of the frequent physiological and emotional disturbances, deviations of character and behavioral disorders accompanying them often towards maturation. The research goal is to describe and analyze the differences between delinquent and non-delinquent adolescents using psychological tools to highlight differences between them in terms of depression (Beck Depression Inventory), anxiety (STAI X1 and STAI X2), aggression (Test of Aggression) and maladaptive personality tendencies (Maladaptive Personality Tendencies). The comparative analysis is made between two equal samples of 30 subjects who were assigned according to the degree juvenile delinquency or non-delinquency. The first sample was randomly chosen from the resident adolescents of one Reeducation Center. All the children selected are juvenile males, with the average age of 17 years old, serving a sentence at the reeducation center. The second sample was randomly chosen from a school in Timisoara, with the same average age, 17 years old. The research results have shown major differences between the two groups of children regarding the variables taken into study.

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1. Introduction

Research in the field of juvenile delinquency is of continuous interest to those trying to gain deeper knowledge in the delinquency phenomenon, not only because juvenile delinquency precedes adult delinquency (criminal potential is manifested at a small age), but also because it is generally the period which offers permanent sources for research on adolescence.

More so, this research is necessary in Romania, where the judicial and penitentiary system that addresses this phenomenon is changing continuously, on a still unstable territory. For this reason, a series of researches are trying to find new ways of approaching delinquency, new methods of intervention in the case of these adolescents, integration and educational options; the fact that these need to be differentiated from the manner of intervention in adults being well known.

In a country where the percentage of delinquents among adolescents is increasing, probably due also to the period of socio-economical instability, there is the need for a well designed system for prevention, integration, and also for a penitentiary system that does not turn these children into higher risk delinquents. In the communist period,

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correctional schools functioning on Romanian territory highlighted especially the correctional, punitive aspect, and the children had to endure unhygienic conditions, the preoccupation for the reintegration of the minor being almost inexistent. In current times, justice and the penitentiary system addressed to minors have started on an ascending path, towards modernization and adaptation to international trends in the matter. In this case, accent is put on the dimension of reeducation, *correctional schools* having changed their names into *Reeducation Centers*, and education in view of reintegration becoming the main concern of those involved in working with delinquent minors.

Adolescence is a period of extremes, this signifying the fact that the adolescent oscillates between being hard working and lazy, exuberant and apathetic, cruel and sensitive. Because of this, adolescence has been given different names: juvenile crisis, originality crisis, the difficult age, the drama age, the age of great ideals etc. Viewed from another perspective, adolescence represents the most complex developmental stage of the youth on his way to maturity. This stage seems to be the most problematic in the educational process because of the frequent physiological disturbances, emotional imbalances, character deviances and behavioral disturbances which often accompany maturation. Biological development is diversified and individualized, sensitivity and imagination are enriched, conduct becomes increasingly unstable, ideals are nuanced gaining new values, creativity is stated more and more visibly, through the array of personal initiatives, which frequently force the adolescent to be in conflict with the ambience. In this period the most frequent conflicts are with parents and educators.

One of the traits of the adolescent is being a person that overtly claims his autonomy and individuality, but at the same time remains profoundly dependant on the family frame of childhood.

2. The Reeducation Center – educational community for delinquent children

One of the most significant changes in penal justice can be found in the expression of an institution that must be well integrated among the institutions for enforcement of sentences and educational measures. This institution is the reeducation center.

Reeducation centers are special educational, teaching and professional qualification units, destined for minors that have committed acts stipulated by penal law and in the case of which, the courts have decided to enforce the measure of commitment in a reeducation center.

The purpose of these institutions is the rehabilitation of delinquent minors, through correcting their undesirable behaviors, creating and developing those abilities and attitudes that permit their reintegration in the community, education and professionalization according to their possibilities.

The activity of such units has 2 components: one that targets the learning and professionalization process; and the second, orientated towards specific therapy, educational, cultural, sporting, practical and recreational programs.

Starting with the year 2011, reeducation centers in Romania have entered an ample transformation process with regards to both the quality of living, schooling and professionalization conditions; and also regarding the contents of moral and social recovery programs.

Among the institutions with the same profile, the Reeducation Center Buziaș, where this research was conducted, constitutes a national premiere. This is due to the fact that by its means of organization, the premises are created for transforming a custodial institution into an educational community that places accent on the protection and rehabilitation of the minor, in a secure environment with educational valence.

Being well known that giving responsibility to the minors has a positive influence on their social reintegration process, and because the center is equipped with modern utilities, minors can perform household activities, such as: preparing and serving breakfast, self-serving in the dining hall, washing and ironing clothes and linen, cleaning and maintaining cleanliness in their rooms, classes and shops. All these activities are destined for the birth and development of skills and attitudes needed in daily life.

Especially during adolescence, aggressive manifestations are attempts of asserting ones independence and moral autonomy, of rejecting the authority of the adult.

Like other forms of social behavior, aggression is formed through social learning. In the socialization process, aggressive responses are acquired either through direct learning, as an effect of rewards or punishment, or through observing and imitating other peoples' behaviors and their consequences.

Both at an emotional and behavioral level, aggression is a cultural product. Cultures and subcultures can develop different combinations of aggression, fear, hate, which in certain situations can be premises for deviant behavior.

3. Applied study regarding the psychological factors involved in juvenile delinquency

The purpose of this research is to describe and analyze the differences between delinquent and non-delinquent adolescents, with regards to depression, anxiety, aggression and maladaptive personality tendencies. The study is a differential, non-experimental one, that seeks to discover the differences between the variables taken into consideration (delinquents and non-delinquent adolescents). 60 children were comprised in this research, divided into two different samples: one sample containing 30 persons of the minor population incarcerated in reeducation regime, and one sample of 30 children, from the same age category, but from a regular school.

The instruments used in this research were:

- B.D.I. (BECK DEPRESSION INVENTORY)
- SELF EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE S. T. A. I. –X1 and X2
- T.D.P. QUESTIONNAIRE (MALADAPTIVE PERSONALITY TENDENCIES)
- TEST OF AGRESSION for physical and verbal aggression, fury and hostility.

4. Quantitative and qualitative analysis of data

Following quantitative and qualitative processing of the data obtained after applying the instruments mentioned above, significant differences can be observed between delinquent and non-delinquent adolescents, with regards to the level of aggression.

To verify the differences between the two adolescent groups, delinquent and non-delinquent, we have chosen to use T test for independent groups. The motivation for this choice is obvious: numeric data are used and the groups are formed randomly; there exists no correspondent between the two; no repeated testing was done on the same group.

Regarding aggression, by analyzing the results of the t test for equality of means, the difference between the two means is significant (30,3333 – 16,9333), with regards to physical aggression. We note that $t(58) = 8.595$, $p < .01$. Therefore, the result is statistically significant, meaning that there are significant differences between the studied groups. Analyzing the differences between the two means (21,0000 – 15,7667), higher by five points with regards to fury, we can conclude that there are significant differences between the two groups. The Levene test gives an statistically insignificant result, $F=,383$, $p>.10$, meaning that we can rely on the first t. We can observe $t(58) = 6.788$, $p < .01$. Consequently, the result is statistically significant, there being significant differences between the two studied groups.

Finally, with regards to the level of hostility, after the analysis of the two means (28,4667 – 18,8000), we can conclude that there are significant differences between the two groups. Noticeable is the statistically insignificant result of the Levene test, $F=,032$, $p>.10$, which means that we can trust the first t. Thus, the result is statistically significant, meaning that there are significant differences between the two groups studied. Looking at the descriptive data furnished, we can conclude that delinquent adolescents are predominantly more aggressive than non-delinquent adolescents.

Evaluating the difference between delinquent and non-delinquent adolescents, with regards to aggression, we can conclude that the first are more aggressive, both physically and verbally, they are more hostile and angry in certain situations.

In an attempt to discuss these differences step by step, we can state that the physical aggression in delinquent minors can be an expression of the lack of control of aggressive impulses, of the fact that they cannot handle being provoked. Other causes for physical aggression in adolescents can be that they are more frequently

implicated in conflict situations, that they project their anger on surrounding things, or that they consider they are entitled to obtain their rights through physical violence.

Verbal aggression is also a characteristic of delinquent adolescents. Generally having a history of failure, they have learned throughout life to openly express their disapproval for any unfavorable situation, to express their thoughts without taking into consideration that they can bother others, or to respond to the reproaches of others by being verbally abusive. Also noticeable is the fact that these delinquent adolescents come from disadvantaged environments, from disorganized families, where they did not receive a stable education, haven't been the center of their parents attention, or have had inappropriate parental models. Unlike them, the non-delinquents benefit from education in their families and schools, they have parents who act responsibly towards their children and their own lives.

With regards to fury, it can appear due to the fact that delinquent adolescents have the tendency not to hide their irritation towards certain situations, they usually get angry quite easily, giving the impression that they like to argue, or have difficulty in controlling their emotions or outbursts. These aspects can be due to a lack in motivation, as well as to a lack of real stimulation from their environment, considering the limited space in which they function. Thus, the lack of possibilities and the restrictions imposed can lead to an increase in aggression and consequently of fury.

Hostility can be due to jealousy, to all the mistakes he has made in life and to the fact that detention, as a consequence of his actions, may have been avoided. Envy towards the success of others, dissatisfaction towards their own lives, suspicion towards unknown or pleasant people are other causes of hostility. All these can be due to the labeling of delinquent adolescent by society, which on few occasions gave them the opportunity to prove their own abilities to themselves and to others; but on the contrary, didn't acknowledge their abilities in the rare cases in which they had the opportunity to do so. Consequently, the causes for hostility can be a result of the feeling of inferiority towards other people, strangers or acquaintances. Regarding non-delinquent adolescents, aggression is less substantial because attending school enforces their sense of equality with others, giving them the possibility to stand out intellectually each time their abilities are valued.

The difference in the level of aggression between the two groups is notable, in the sense that delinquent adolescents are more aggressive, partly because of their precarious backgrounds, and also because of their permanent labeling, as a consequence of the crime committed. All these are absent in non-delinquents, them being described using only characteristics indigenous to adolescence.

Through the application of the established instruments, significant differences between the two groups of children were found in this study, with regards to anxiety, level of depression, and maladaptive personality tendencies.

5. Conclusions and limitations of the study

The results of this research show that:

- Regarding aggression, there are significant differences between delinquent and non-delinquent adolescents, in the sense that it manifests itself more substantially in delinquent adolescents.
- Delinquents are more anxious, regarding anxiety both as a state, and as a feature.
- There are significant differences between the two groups of subjects in the level of depression.
- Regarding maladaptive personality tendencies of delinquents, it was demonstrated that delinquents are significantly different from non-delinquents in psycho-social priors, neurasthenia, depression, schizoidism, paranoia, verbal understanding, frustration endurance, motivation. There are no differences between the two groups regarding honesty, emotional immaturity and instability, hysterical tendencies, psychopathy and emotional balance.

One of the limits of the study regarding psychological factors involved in juvenile delinquency is that the samples are too small to allow generalization of the results that were obtained.

The difficulties encountered in realizing the study were generated on the one hand by the access to the group of delinquent minors, there being only one institution of this kind in the western part of Romania, where approximately 70 minor delinquents are incarcerated, in a reeducation regime. The intellectual level of a great part of these children is under the average, being incapable of reading or writing. Consequently, one of the study's limits is the small number of subjects, due to the constraints of these external variables.

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